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ABSTRACT

The preschool and kindergarten years are the best time to help children establish a positive cycle in their social relations. Teachers and caregivers can provide models of interactive skills, set patterns for class interaction, and provide help to children who are in the process of acquiring and strengthening social understanding and skills. The purpose of this paper is to describe the many ways that teachers can contribute to young children's social development. One of the main themes throughout this discussion is the importance of teachers speaking to children warmly and directly, using matter-of-fact, straightforward speech. The first section offers a brief discussion of what is meant by social competence and how it develops; content focuses on four components of social competence and six influences on its development. The second section presents general teaching strategies for helping children achieve social competence, addressing optimal teacher intervention, social difficulties as opportunities for teaching, respect for children's feelings, and 13 aspects of authentic communication. The third section describes 12 specific teaching strategies for helping childen overcome social difficulties, including four related to fostering social understanding and eight related to strengthening interactive skills. The fourth section addresses some curriculum issues that are related to fostering social growth in young children, including balancing individual and group activities, deciding among curriculum approaches, and selecting appropriate types of materials and activities. A list of 65 references is included. (RH)

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The Teacher's Role in the Social Development of Young Children

Lilian G. Katz
Diane E. McClellan

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

I. Social Competence in the Early Years 3

Components of Social Competence 3

Social Understanding and Interaction Skills 3
Varieties of Social Difficulties 4
Shyness 6
Sociability versus Intimacy 7

Influences on the Development of Social Competence 8

The Role of Peers 9
The Recursive Cycle 10
Learning through Interaction 12
Learning through Observation 13
Social Competence and Cultural Diversity 14
Social Skills Training 15

II. General Teaching Strategies 18

Optimum Teacher Intervention 18
Social Difficulties as Opportunities for Teaching 19
Respect for Children's Feelings 19
Authentic Communication 23
Establishing Credibility 23
Simple and Straightforward Explanations 26
Explicit Communication of Expectations 27
Appropriate Use of Timeout 30
Motivating Children without Putting Others Down 32
The Disposition to Approach Social Conflicts Experimentally 32
The Content of Relationships 33

Fostering a Sense of Justice with Ground Rules 34
Appealing to Children's Good Sense 35
Character Definition 36
Allowing Time to Observe 38
Helping Children Cope with Adversity 39
The Teacher as Model 40

III. Specific Teaching Strategies 41

Fostering Social Understanding 41

Arousing Children's Empathy and Altruism 41
Alerting Children to Others' Feelings and Interests 42
Encouraging Alternative Interpretations of Behavior 43
Helping Children Discover Common Ground 44

Strengthening Interactive Skills 45

Approach Strategies 45
Verbal Approaches 45
Turn-Taking Skills 46
Negotiating Skills 47
Suggesting Reasons for Assertions 47
Help for Bullies 48
Pairing Children 50
Tattling 50

Summary 52

IV. Provision of Worthwhile Activities 53

Balancing Individual and Group Activities 53
Curriculum Approaches 54
Types of Materials and Activities 57

Conclusion 59

References 61

A Brief Guide to ERIC 67

Introduction

There is little of importance in our everyday lives that does not involve interaction with others. Almost all of the activities and experiences people count as meaningful and significant—family life, work, and recreation—include or even depend on relations with others. Inasmuch as interpersonal relationships constitute major sources of gratification, companionship, and enjoyment for most people at all ages, inability to initiate and maintain relationships is a source of anguish and loneliness, even in the early years (Ladd, 1990).

Rogoff (1990), building on the work of Vygotsky, makes a convincing case that children's cognitive development occurs mainly in the context of social relationships. Rogoff's research shows that young children are essentially "apprentices in thinking" who learn "from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society" (p. 7).

An accumulating body of evidence indicates that children who fail to achieve minimal competence in social relationships with their peers are at risk of developing a variety of social maladaptation later in their lives (Parker & Asher, 1987). Furthermore, there is evidence that the quality of children's social competence as early as the kindergarten year accurately predicts academic as well as social competence in later grades (Pellegrini & Glickman, 1990). The risks in adolescence and adulthood include academic failure, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, and later mental health problems (Kupersmidt, 1983; Cowen, Pederson, Babigian, Izzo, & Trost, 1973; Parker & Asher, 1987).

The purpose of this paper is to describe the many ways that teachers can help young children with their social development. The first section is a brief discussion of what we mean by *social competence* and how it develops. The second section presents general teaching strategies for helping children achieve social competence. The third section describes specific teaching strategies for helping children overcome social difficulties, and the fourth takes up some curriculum issues related to fostering social growth in young children.

I. Social Competence in the Early Years

Although definitions of social competence in young children vary, they generally involve the ability to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships with peers. This ability depends on many kinds of social understanding and interaction skills.

Components of Social Competence

Social Understanding and Interaction Skills. Much social understanding and many skills are needed to maintain reciprocal relationships. Those children who have a basic knowledge of the language, norms, and customs of their peers are more likely than others to participate competently in their peers' activities. Children's growing capacities for communicating, discussing, negotiating, turn-taking, cooperating, articulating preferences and reasons behind their actions, accepting compromises, and empathizing with others play a part in social interaction.

According to Gottman (1983), socially skilled young children are able to synchronize themselves with others by establishing common ground, exchanging information, and exploring similarities and differences, while simultaneously resolving conflicts that occur during play. Gottman also reports that well-liked children are more able than less well-liked children to

communicate clearly to their playmates and can also engage in more self-disclosure with them. Dodge (1983) reports that social approach patterns constitute key social skills in second graders.

In addition, Dodge (1983) shows that peer-directed aggression is a factor in determining status among peers. Boys who engage in inappropriate, disruptive, antisocial, and aggressive play behaviors become unpopular. Boys who become popular are able to establish sustained interaction with another child.

On the basis of extensive field notes and videotaping in the field, Corsaro (1985) found that a large percentage of a preschool child's social interaction consists of efforts to gain access to play groups and to resist other children's attempts to access play groups in which the child is involved. In the study, children met initial resistance 54% of the times they tried to gain access to group play. There was substantial conflict due to attempts to gain or limit access to ongoing groups. Children switched activities and play partners frequently. Thus approach skills were central to social participation and success. Other behaviors related to social skillfulness or peer acceptance include giving positive attention to others and requesting information from them; requesting information from others about what they are doing, planning, and so forth; and being able to contribute to ongoing discussion among peers (Bierman & Furman, 1984; Coie & Krehbiel, 1984; Gottman & Schuler, 1976; Mize & Ladd, 1990).

Varieties of Social Difficulties. Children in preschool and kindergarten settings display a wide variety of social difficulties that can have an equally wide variety of underlying causes. Some children have not yet achieved enough impulse control for successful turn-taking, negotiating, bargaining, and other strategies for resolving conflicts with peers. Some lack knowledge and experience of the give-and-take of peer interaction. Some have acquired some

beginning social skills, but do not use them with enough confidence to succeed in dynamic interplay with peers. Some are still so dependent on adults that their interaction with playmates is too frequently interrupted by requests for adult assistance. Some have not yet mastered ways of stating their feelings and desires clearly enough to effectively communicate with peers. Others have not yet learned how to clearly articulate their reasons for insisting on their preferences and rights. Some are not yet able to stay on the topic discussed by a group of peers. Some have not yet mastered strategies for approaching others successfully. Some are shy, withdrawn, ignored, or isolated. And some behave as though they do not want to interact with their peers and are thus not invited to join the ongoing activities.

Children who resist or reject classroom norms and procedures do so for various reasons. Uncooperative and disruptive behaviors can be expressions of underlying emotional distress originating outside the classroom. Resistance to classroom procedures may be a manifestation of children's increasing but poorly managed autonomy (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990). In other cases, the resistance may be due to the developmental inappropriateness of the curriculum for the individual. The activities may be too formal, academic, or boring, or they may not be relevant enough to the child's experience. Sometimes either a permissive or an authoritarian classroom ethos may lead to the manifestation of social problems among children whose social functioning in other settings might be quite adequate. Some children create social disturbances because they cannot perform the tasks expected of them, and some cannot attend to the tasks because of their social difficulties. Social difficulties in the class may indicate that some children are too young to spend more than a few hours per day in a group setting or that the number of children with whom they must interact is too great for their stage of social development. However, since

participation in a child care group setting is the best option available to their families, teachers look for ways to minimize the stresses some youngsters feel when surrounded by groups of peers for long periods of time.

The causes of early social difficulties vary widely. Some children are handicapped by an appearance or name that is unusual among their peers. Some children lack appropriate skills simply because of insufficient opportunity to learn and practice them. Teachers report that some children change residence so often that their budding relationships are often broken, and opportunities to form real friendships have frequently been thwarted.

Teachers and caregivers cannot always discern the underlying causes of the social difficulties they encounter. However, many of the pedagogical and curriculum decisions that teachers make have an impact on the social experiences of their pupils.

Shyness. Some researchers estimate that as much as 80% of the U.S. population is shy at some time in their lives. This is not to suggest that teachers should not help children to overcome shyness and make satisfying contact with other children. Rather, such a statement acknowledges that most children overcome early shyness spontaneously and reassures teachers and parents that it is unnecessary and unwise to push shy children too quickly.

However, marked shyness, withdrawal, and isolation do have developmental ramifications. What may be appropriate timidity for a two- or three-year-old may be a cause for concern when the child is four or five. For example, a three-year-old typically spends much time in parallel or solitary play, but this pattern is less appropriate for a five-year-old. Gottman (1977) reported a significant difference between preschoolers who played alone much of the time but were constructive in their play, and preschoolers who played alone but in a manner that was escapist

or negative. Rubin and Everett (1982), who also found qualitative differences in social competence reflected in the play of preschoolers, termed the differences they found "immature solitary play" (e.g., solitary dramatic play) and "mature solitary play" (e.g., play with puzzles and other activities that lend themselves to solitary play).

In sum, the research indicates that if children work or play alone primarily because they lack the understandings and skills required for satisfying interaction with other children, particularly if rejected by them, intervention may be required.

Sociability versus Intimacy. Achieving social competence does not imply that all children have to be "social butterflies." The emphasis in assessing a child's social development is best placed on the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of relationships. It is possible for individuals to be sociable and easygoing with many other individuals, but still lack the capacity to care for and feel deeply attached to a few. The more time children spend in the very early years in group settings like child care centers and preschools, the more important this distinction may be. While the capacities for sociability and intimacy are probably not mutually exclusive, it is generally a good idea to be aware of their distinct functions and, when assessing a child's social development, to observe the child's capacity to form close and caring relationships with a few peers.

Children vary considerably in the rates of social interaction that can be considered in the normal range. However, studies of the association between low rates of interaction in childhood and later maladjustment have been inconclusive (Michael, Morris, & Soroker, 1957; Morris, Soroker & Burruss, 1954; Robins, 1974; Coie & Dodge, 1983). Hymel, Rubin, Rowden, & LeMare (1990) recently reported a follow-up study of fifth-grade children who were identified

in second grade as anxious, fearful, or withdrawn. Their results indicate that early social withdrawal seems to limit children's opportunities to develop adequate social skills, which in turn leads to further withdrawal. They conclude that "early social withdrawal or isolation. . . . may indeed be a risk factor in early development and should not be ignored" (p. 2019).

On the basis of currently available knowledge of social development, we suggest that it is not a source of concern if children choose to work or play alone, as long as they are capable of competent and satisfying interaction with other children when such interaction is desired, appropriate, or necessary. In general, isolation and withdrawal in mild form are probably not related to later life difficulties.

The studies discussed above are only beginning to improve our understanding of the behavioral correlates of peer acceptance and social competence. The studies do not tell the whole story of the causes and consequences of early social difficulties, but they do suggest that the preschool years may be an optimal time to help children who are experiencing difficulties with peer relationships (Rubin & Everett, 1982).

Influences on the Development of Social Competence

The development of complex peer interactive skills and the social understandings that contribute to social competence is influenced by many factors. Among them are the opportunity to observe and interact with peers and the guidance and support of parents, teachers, and other adults involved in a child's care and education.

The Role of Peers. One of the most important influences on children's social development is experience within the family (Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Hartup & Moore, 1990). But not all the children within a particular family achieve the same success in developing social competence because the family does not provide a single environment. Therefore, the processes by which the children within the family acquire social understandings and skills are not easy to pinpoint. However, inasmuch as young children are spending increasing amounts of time in group settings, their teachers are able to play a significant role in shaping a child's experiences with peers.

As children move out of infancy and toddlerhood, peers play an increasingly important part in their social development. Suomi and Harlow (1975) compared the effects that early peer deprivation and maternal deprivation have on the development of infant Rhesus monkeys. They found that peer deprivation had deeper and longer-lasting adverse consequences than did maternal deprivation. They concluded that most social learning in Rhesus monkeys takes place among peers. Experiments like that of Suomi and Harlow obviously cannot be conducted with human beings. But results of such experiments strengthen our concern for the early achievement of social competence in children. It may also be that children who fail to establish satisfying relationships with peers, especially if their rejection is due to aggression, eventually find each other and form subgroups. The sense of belonging on the part of the members of such subgroups depends on shared hostility and resentment toward larger groups by whom they feel rejected (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991).

Freud and Dann's (1951) classical wartime study of a group of young children who were separated from their parents very early and who developed passionate attachments to each other

indicates that their relationships with each other seemed to minimize the emotional damage normally associated with their tragic situation. Throughout the early years these "motherless" children resisted the approaches of the adults who cared for them. A hypothesis suggested by Freud and Dann's experience with these children is that, when young children are unable to develop adequate attachments to adults—for whatever reason—an emotional vacuum is created, and this vacuum may be filled by attachments to peers. If this hypothesis is valid, it suggests further that children with insufficient or weak attachments to adults are subject to early and intense dependence on peer acceptance and may be especially susceptible to peer influence throughout childhood. This possibility is a cause for concern because, during the first dozen or so years of life, peers are less likely than adults to be appropriate sources of influence on the development of children's character.

The importance of early peer relationships was also demonstrated by Schwarz (1972), who found that preschool children were significantly less stressed by unfamiliar situations if another child was present, even an unknown child, than when they were alone. Putallaz and Gottman (1981) speculate that vulnerability to later life problems, evident in adults with a history of early social difficulties, is partly a result of the years of positive peer interaction that rejected and neglected children miss because of reduced interaction with peers. It is also due in part to the persistence of patterns of interaction. In particular, behavioral traits related to aggression have been shown to be highly stable over time, difficult to change (Coie & Dodge, 1983; Parker & Asher, 1987), and predictive of later life difficulties in situations calling for social interaction.

The Recursive Cycle. Evidence suggests that differences in preschoolers' social competence and peer acceptance remain fairly stable well into the elementary years and beyond

(Ladd, 1983). Without some kind of intervention, children quickly assume the social status and behavior they held in past groups when they find themselves in new social situations (Dodge, 1983). This tendency is compounded by reputational biases that have been formed by middle childhood and may make it difficult for a child to break out of an established reputation even if new social skills have been learned (Bierman & Furman, 1984).

The long-range, persistent effects of early social difficulties may be understood as a recursive cycle phenomenon. The principle of the recursive cycle is that once individuals have a given behavior pattern, responses to them tend to elicit more of that behavior. For example, children who are friendly, likable, and attractive tend to elicit positive responses in others fairly easily. Because they receive positive responses, they become more friendly, likable, and attractive. Their opportunities to practice and polish social skills and learn new ones increase, and a positive cycle continues.

Similarly, children who are unattractive, unfriendly, and difficult to approach or enjoy tend to be avoided or rejected by others. In response to this avoidance and rejection, they tend to repeat the same patterns, often with increased intensity, making them even more unlikable and unattractive. This sequence increases the likelihood that these children will be avoided or rejected more and more often. Subsequently, their opportunities to interact with peers and to practice and polish whatever skills they do have gradually diminish. Thus a debilitating cycle becomes well established. Such social patterns, once organized, become more and more resistant to change with each uninterrupted recurrence (Cairns, 1986).

Children cannot break a negative cycle by themselves. Even adults who are aware of the need to modify their social responses have considerable difficulty doing so. They may try

reminding themselves to "count to ten before speaking" or "bite your tongue" and may use other kinds of self-instructions with little success. One reason for the difficulty is that the patterns become so well learned they seem to occur automatically. Another is that social interaction results from largely unself-conscious behavior. Indeed, if we constantly monitored our own social behavior, it might strike a false note, seem affected, and be difficult to maintain for more than short periods.

Efforts to break negative patterns of social responses require a great deal of thought and intentionality on the teacher's part. We suggest, however, that one of the most important roles of a teacher of young children is to intervene on their behalf when they seem to be caught in a negative recursive cycle and to help shift them into a positive one.

On the basis of the research, it is reasonable to assume that, in principle, the younger the child, the more easily parents and teachers can help him or her overcome social difficulties. Children experiencing such difficulties during the preschool and kindergarten years can often be helped to shift into a positive cycle in a matter of weeks. When assistance is delayed until the middle childhood or adolescent years, the chances of successfully overcoming the difficulties are substantially more problematic.

Learning through Interaction. Like most learning during the early years, social skills are learned and strengthened primarily through interactive processes. Social understanding and social skills—both adaptive and maladaptive—are learned primarily through the give-and-take of peer play and work. A child learns to be a friend or a bully through experience with others. However, interactions cannot occur in a vacuum: they have to have content. For sustained relationships to develop, the interactions between the participants have to be *about* something.

In the case of young children, meaningful interaction is most likely to occur in the context of activities of genuine interest to the interactors. Thus the nature and content of the curriculum for young children is important to both social and intellectual development (see Katz and Chard, 1989).

Learning through Observation. Many young children also learn social strategies from observing the interactions of others. They are especially likely to adopt styles of interaction observed within the family (Parke, 1990; Hartup & Moore, 1990). Many children are also keen observers of social life in the preschool setting, taking note of what can happen; what works; who is potentially dangerous, hostile, helpful, accepting; and so forth.

Modeling has been shown to be a useful tool for social learning. O'Connor (1969, 1972) showed a film of preschoolers successfully seeking entry into an ongoing play group of preschoolers identified as isolated. During the film, a narrator pointed out elements of the action related to key concepts of social interaction. The children who viewed the film significantly increased their rate of interaction, which remained stable in a follow-up study several weeks later. Similar research comparing control groups with children exposed to various models who demonstrate behaviors such as generosity, cheating, selfishness, helping, or rescuing shows long-term benefits (Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1986). Thus it seems reasonable to assume that children can serve as either positive or negative models for each other in the classroom.

Of course, the teacher can also be a powerful positive model. Occasionally the teacher is a contradictory or confusing model of social behavior. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear a teacher whose voice level is high ask children to use "quiet" voices. It seems more than coincidental that their voice levels frequently rise to meet that of their teacher!

Social Competence and Cultural Diversity

All cultures define appropriate patterns of interaction and feelings between adults and children, and among children themselves. Cultures vary in how much and in what ways positive and negative feelings are to be expressed in day-to-day social relations. Some cultures differentiate constraints and expectations for social behavior depending on gender more than others do. Some emphasize cooperation, competition, obedience, and other values more than others. Ratner & Stettner (1991) point out that all cultures have implicit "display rules" that tell members when it is or is not appropriate to laugh, smile, cry, feel sorry, and so forth. Ratner & Stettner assert that "cultural display rules are, in effect, instructions that regulate which expressive behaviors are communicated and expected in specific circumstances and are required in the course of growing up in a particular culture" (1991, p. 11).

Teachers of young children cannot be expected to be familiar with all of the norms, values, and expectations of each of the cultural groups represented by their pupils. But awareness that there are such variations can go a long way toward helping teachers correctly interpret a child's behavior, feelings and needs. A child whose home culture encourages physical contact or the sharing of food between friends, for example, may take others' refusal to do so as a personal rejection. A teacher can help bridge the distance between the cultures of the children involved by indicating that children are used to doing many things differently at home. While the teacher can respect the cultural norms and values of social relationships a child brings to the

school setting from home, she can also help each child to feel comfortable, included, competent and integrated in the classroom group, and the culture of the school.

Social Skills Training. During the preschool years, interactive skills are not easily learned by means of direct instruction in the form of lectures, lessons, workbooks, magic circles, bibliotherapy, or similar moralizing approaches. It is doubtful that young children can be instructed in the discrete components of social skillfulness in a way that can significantly alter their social competence in the long run. Packer and Richardson (1989) offer a case study of a preschooler who did many of the "right" things when seeking entry to groups and playing with others, but whose behavior was nevertheless out of sync with that of her peers. As a result, they did not like her. Packer and Richardson suggest that there is a total organization to the child's behavior that would not be altered significantly even if she were taught a few discrete, individual, relevant social skills. It may be that social interaction patterns—effective and ineffective ones—are integrated into the personality organization of an individual and as such are not readily addressed in separate, fragmented subskills.

Once children have entered into a negative cycle, they need the help of an adult to break out of it. One way of helping is to identify the problem and then, by thinking of oneself as teacher, coach, and friend, gradually help them break the cycle. Mize and Ladd (1990) suggest that those who wish to identify the origin of a problem and help children change their behavior should consider three questions: (1) Do these children have the knowledge they need to be socially effective? Do they know, for example, that other children generally do not want to be friends with children who hit? They may know that they lack friends and—having heard it often enough—that hitting "isn't good," but have they made the connection between the two things?

(2) Are the children able to act in accordance with their knowledge? (3) Are they able to apply the social understandings gained in interaction to future interactions?

As with most learning with young children, help in learning social skills is probably best carried out informally. There may be something to be said, however, for discussing and solving some problems away from the troubled context or after the heat of the moment, when neither teacher nor child is feeling defensive or angry over the incident in question. The usefulness of a postmortem analysis of this kind depends, to some degree, on the child's age and general ability to reflect on his or her own behavior. There is evidence that instruction about alternative behaviors to aggression does decrease aggression (Schickedanz, Schickedanz, & Forsyth, 1982). Zahavi and Asher (1978), for example, have found that preschoolers who briefly discuss the consequences of positive and negative social behavior with their teacher subsequently engage in less aggressive behavior. This intervention may have been successful because the children were guided individually. Previous research that examined the effectiveness of giving rules for behavior to the whole class did not always find it effective (e.g., Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 1968). The individual guidance may ensure that the child is listening, allow the child to be more involved in constructing the rule or concept which, as Piaget (1983) has stated, increases the depth of learning, and makes it possible for the teacher to give the instruction with warmth and caring for the child (which may also increase the depth of the child's learning).

These illustrations should not be construed as arguments against the usefulness of social skill training or direct instruction in social skills. These methods may be useful for some children, especially if they are closely tied to specific interactions and incidents. Rather, we suggest that intervention designed to change poor patterns of social interaction is likely to be most effective

if it is offered in the context in which the faulty interaction occurs. In other words, an important ingredient in fostering good peer relationships in young children is the opportunity for them to interact about something significant in the presence of adults who, when necessary, can suggest social strategies appropriate to the context in which they are to be applied.

In our view, the preschool and kindergarten years are the best time to help children establish a positive cycle in their social relations. Teachers and caregivers can provide models of interactive skills, set patterns for class interaction, and provide help to children who are in the process of acquiring and strengthening social understanding and skills. The discussion below offers teachers some principles and strategies related to this important aspect of promoting children's development.

II. General Teaching Strategies

The principles and teaching strategies outlined below are based on our understanding and interpretation of the evidence, our experiences as teachers, and our experiences with teachers of young children in a wide variety of settings. We use the term *principle* to refer to a generalization that is sufficiently reliable to warrant consideration by teachers who are making decisions about appropriate strategies to use.

As extensive research on children's social development indicates, the way parents discipline or react to their children's "misbehavior" has a profound impact on children's social behavior (Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1986; Parke, 1990). It is likely that methods of discipline used by teachers of young children can influence children's social development. Research related to parental discipline and its implications for teaching are therefore considered in our discussion of principles of practice for teachers.

Optimum Teacher Intervention

Conflict is inevitable among members of any truly participatory group of children; it should not, and probably cannot, be completely eliminated. The spontaneous and inevitable social problems

that arise as children work and play together put the teacher in an ideal position to advance children's social development. While intervention in children's behavior is an important part of the teacher's role, more is not necessarily better. Achieving the optimum level requires knowledge of each individual in the group and constant monitoring of each one's progress.

Teachers should intervene as little as possible, so that children can try to solve their own problems, but frequently enough to ensure that no child is falling into a negative recursive cycle. Good decisions concerning when to stand by and when to intervene depend on closely observing interactions and assessing individual children's abilities to resolve conflicts without adult help, assert and defend their rights, and engage in satisfying and constructive work and play.

Social Difficulties as Opportunities for Teaching

Sometimes social difficulties in the early years are manifested in resistance to group processes and classroom routines and rules. Such "misbehavior" is best treated as an *opportunity to teach* children alternative, more effective ways of responding. While some social difficulties of children require help that a teacher cannot give, it is always appropriate to provide a context in which individual children can learn effective ways of handling their impulses and interacting with peers.

Respect for Children's Feelings

To support children's social growth, the classroom environment should be characterized by respect for children's feelings. Some children are reluctant to participate in activities like

storytime and physical exercises, or in group activities like singing, drama, and movement. To respect a child's feelings of reluctance to participate does not mean the teacher agrees that the feelings are justified. For example, a teacher can indicate that she accepts a child's fear of a situation without agreeing that the situation is dangerous.

In cases of reluctance to join an activity, it helps if the teacher indicates that she understands the child may not feel like joining in at the moment, but when the child feels ready, she will be glad to help. The teacher can also offer suggestions about what the child can do while others are involved in the group experience. This strategy respects and accepts children's feelings as valid, protects their sense of autonomy, and minimizes the likelihood that they will dig in their heels and transform their reluctance into stubborn resistance to the group norms. This principle, which is psychologically and ethically appropriate, is likely to minimize the development of a proverbial power struggle between teacher and child.

Crockenberg and Litman (1990) make a useful distinction between self-assertion and defiance in young children, the latter being negativism for its own sake and the former an expression of autonomy and competence. Defiance signals deep problems with authority that deserve special strategies appropriate to the individual's psychosocial history. Crockenberg and Litman point out that authoritative (versus authoritarian) parents are those who exercise control and make appropriate demands for mature behavior, but also listen to their children and can be influenced by them. They report that "mothers who were effective in eliciting compliance from their children and deflecting defiance were very clear about what they wanted, but in addition to listening to their children's objections, they also accommodated them in ways that conveyed respect for the child's autonomy and individuality" (p. 970).

In the case of reluctant children who are not just being defiant but who are exercising their autonomy, we suggest accepting their feelings. As long as other aspects of their functioning in the class are satisfactory, the teacher can encourage them matter of factly to take their time and make their own decisions about when they are ready to change their minds.

We observed an example of an appropriate and effective application of this strategy in the case of a four-year-old who persistently refused to speak in the preschool setting, although her parents described her verbal behavior outside of school as entirely normal. Over a period of some months, the child's teachers tried to modify this behavior by insisting that she could not have her juice and crackers unless she asked for them, which she refused to do. Systematic observations of her behavior also revealed that other than at the daily snack routine, no one spoke to her: we learn early to speak only to those who respond to us! The strategy adopted was to say to her, in a calm and accepting manner, "Maybe you don't feel like talking right now. That's O.K. You don't have to if you don't want to. But when you feel like it, let me know!" The child's feelings were accepted as valid, and autonomy over her own behavior was supported. Within a week, she discarded whatever reservations she had and entered the verbal give-and-take of the classroom group easily, almost in spite of herself!

Some children are more stubborn than others. Stubbornness, in and of itself, is not an undesirable disposition; it may in time be channeled into meaningful and productive persistence at important tasks. Children who do not readily join group activities or conform to classroom procedures are often expressing their individuality and exhibiting their autonomy. Early childhood educators have a longstanding tradition of valuing individual differences and autonomy.

Many teachers are understandably reluctant to allow children such autonomy on the grounds that they will miss significant and enjoyable educational experiences. The principle of validating children's feelings does not mean that children can act on those feelings. We make a distinction between being sensitive to and respectful of children's feelings and indulging them. The principle is easier to apply if teachers are clear in their own minds about which of the experiences they provide are absolutely essential to the child in question, and whether their potential value is worth the anguish and contentiousness engendered by frequent confrontations between teacher and child.

Teachers are often reluctant to allow a child not to participate in a group activity on the grounds that many other children will also decline to participate. In such cases, the activity can be continued with a small willing group or can temporarily be dropped from the schedule to be resumed at a later time. The teacher can periodically ask children whether they would like to resume the activity. If it has any real merit, the children are likely to welcome its resumption after a brief hiatus. If most of them appear disinterested in the activity, a reexamination of its suitability is warranted.

We suggest that, as long as no danger to the child or to others is involved in the incident in question, individuals should be allowed to have power over their own decisions, especially if a child is shy or self-conscious. If a teacher attempts to coax, cajole, nag, or push individual children into a desired behavior, they may feel intimidated or threatened. Validating children's feelings reassures them that they are understood and respected and that help is available when it is needed or desired.

Authentic Communication

A major responsibility of teachers is to help children with the transition from home to a group setting that has its own requirements and routines. For many children, the adults who educate and care for them in the early childhood setting are the first important relationships outside their families. We suggest that the ethos of the group is best if it is marked by straightforward and authentic communication about the norms, rules, and expectations for participation in the group.

Establishing Credibility. In adult-child relationships, credibility means that children perceive the adults to mean what they say most of the time. Usually the degree to which a teacher can help young children acquire impulse control depends on how credible her suggestions, requests, and demands are and on whether the signals she gives concerning her expectations and standards are reasonably clear rather than mixed, confusing, or ambiguous. Credibility is strengthened when a teacher expresses her expectations simply and directly. It is undermined when teachers say things like, "We don't throw sand," especially when the child just did! It would be preferable to say directly something like, "I do not want anyone to throw sand," or "Sand is not to be thrown; it is to be used with the spade and containers."

Sometimes teachers mistakenly use questions as an indirect way to teach the rules. The following real-life examples illustrate the use of questions to tell children what is expected:

- A teacher responded to a child who demanded a place on her lap during storytime by asking, "How do you think the others feel when you sit on my lap during storytime?"
- A teacher who intervened in a squabble over the use of glue, asked, "How do you think someone feels when you grab their glue?"

• Intervening on behalf of an isolated child, the teacher asked, "Do you think we could ask Jake to play with us?"

What could the child say in answer to the first question? If the child says, "I don't care," what could the teacher say: "You should care," or "That's not nice"? In the particular incident observed, it was reasonably certain that the child did know how most of the other children would feel, but that he could not postpone the strong impulse to be close to his teacher. Sitting on the lap of a reader is probably a very natural and pleasant way for a child to enjoy a story, and very likely many of the children in a preschool would welcome the chance to do so. Thus it would not help much to hint that the others would feel envious. It would probably be more helpful and credible to say, calmly and directly, "I know you like sitting on my lap at storytime, but I want you to wait until I've finished," or "It's hard for me to read and see everyone with someone sitting on my lap," or something similar.

What if the child in the second case responded with, "He doesn't mind"? What could be the teacher's response? When the teacher asked the child the question, what she really wanted to do was indicate that the behavior was inappropriate. By asking the question instead, she undermined her credibility, and perhaps her authority as well. Most children who are involved in incidents such as the one in question know how the injured party feels, but this knowledge does not regulate their behavior. Asking a child in the heat of the moment how others might feel when their rights, desires, or needs are disregarded is rarely useful. While it may not hurt to urge a child to consider how the others might feel in many contexts, in those like the one described it would be more helpful to remind the child that next time he needs the glue, he can ask others for a turn to use it. If the child's communication skills are weak, the teacher can suggest an

appropriate phrase for him to use. If a particular child is frequently involved in such incidents, it might help to stay close to situations in which the proprietary behavior is likely to occur and to intercept it in progress and to suggest alternative behaviors more firmly.

Now let us consider the third question, "Do you think we could ask Jake to play with us?" What can the teacher do if the children say "No" or "He stinks" or "We don't like him"? A more effective approach would be for the teacher to say to the children, "I think it would be a good idea to ask Jake to join us." The children might still disagree and give their reasons. But the teacher has clearly, honestly, and credibly expressed her view of desirable behavior.

A similar problem arises when teachers ask children who are squabbling about things like taking turns with equipment, "What could we have done about this?" or "What could you have said, Johnny?" or "What words could you have used?" These are a type of interrogatory question in that children feel compelled to come up with the answer the teacher wants. Interrogatory questions (i.e., ones to which the questioner already knows the answers) usually make respondents feel defensive. While the teacher's intention to remind children to use verbal approaches to resolving conflicts is appropriate, these essentially rhetorical questions are indirect. Rhetorical questions like these are phony or unreal and make the teacher seem like a wimp!

A similar pattern is often observed when teachers say to children, "You need to sit down," or "You need to wait till I call your name." Most children understand the teacher's message in these cases. But we question the wisdom of attributing needs to children. There is a sense in which someone telling us what we need is intimidating or threatening. We suggest instead that the teacher state her view of what is desirable by saying something like, "Please sit down," or "Please wait until your name is called."

Credibility is also undermined when adults use empty threats in attempts to modify children's behavior. Sometimes a teacher threatens children who do not cooperate in a classroom activity, observe a rule, or carry their weight with classroom responsibilities, by saying that they will not be allowed to enjoy some anticipated special treat. For example, she may say, "You won't be able to have popcorn later if you don't come to the reading group," or "If you can't choose a book during our library time, you will have to stay behind while the others go out to play." In the first place, it is difficult to make the threat match the deviant behavior. Second, threats are often too difficult to carry out on logistical grounds. Some children may sense that such threats signal that a teacher's authority is weak, and thus her credibility is undermined. Similarly, insisting that children make apologies for offending others when they do not feel apologetic can undermine the authenticity of the classroom climate. However, in such incidents a teacher might say something like, "If," or, "When you feel sorry, I hope you will say so."

Simple and Straightforward Explanations. Many teachers (and parents) seem to believe that a violation of a rule should be followed by some kind of punishment. On the contrary, it is often equally or more effective simply to discuss the situation with the child. Maccoby (1980) found that the most effective parental discipline was confrontation of the behavior in a nonpunitive manner. Parpal and Maccoby (1985) also showed that young children were more likely to comply with their parents' requests (e.g., to do chores) when the parents had also been responsive to their children's requests, suggestions, and opinions.

The children of parents who emphasize discussion and who provide reasons when disciplining their children are friendlier than those of parents who do not (Aronfreed, 1968; Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). However, reasoning alone does not appear to be predictive of either

positive or negative outcomes (Radke-Yarrow & Zahn-Waxler, 1986; Crockenberg & Litman, 1990). Similarly, Baumrind (1973) found that neither permissiveness nor strict authoritarianism was associated with happy, self-confident children. Rather, the confident children had a combination of warmth, demandingness, responsiveness, and firmness from their parents.

Explicit Communication of Expectations. Teachers can help children acquire appropriate behavior by making clear to them what is expected and desired in a straightforward and matter-of-fact way. For example, some teachers try to get a child to attend quietly to a group time discussion by saying, "I like the way [another child] is sitting."

Most children understand that the compliment to the other child is intended to alert them to actual or potential negative evaluations of their behavior. Essentially an implied comparison, the statement carries the message that "I like the way Janet is sitting, but not the way Linda is behaving." This strategy is unlikely to build a classroom climate marked by group solidarity.

We do not wish to suggest that children should never be encouraged to engage in self-evaluation. Self-evaluation is part of the process of achieving self-regulation (Stipek, Gralinski, & Kopp, 1990). We simply wish to note that, in our observations of early childhood classes, this kind of attempt to coerce appropriate behavior, when overdone, can undermine the development of positive and accepting relationships among classmates.

Furthermore, the cumulative risks of complimenting one child in order to change the behavior of another are that children may learn that they are in jeopardy when another child is flattered. They may also learn that their own worth and acceptability are only comparative. This comparative method may teach children to feel that they are being put down when others are being approved. They may learn to take comfort in the criticism of their classmates. Some

children may become excessively meek in the presence of authority or fearful of being pointed at in group situations.

A teaching strategy such as saying, "I like the way Lesley is sitting," may be effective in temporarily controlling behavior and may initially reinforce good or acceptable behavior. Such comments may also be helpful in the early stages of teaching children to be aware of the group and the effects their vocalizations and movements have on the group's goals and activities. However, our informal observation suggests that this strategy is often used manipulatively, sometimes indiscriminately, and is typically applied to a few of the same children repeatedly. All this indicates that the strategy is ineffective.

In other words, if this method of classroom management is used for about the first month of school and it is effective, it should need to be used only rarely thereafter. But if the teacher continues to use the method regularly, she does so because the technique is not effective. Again, in most cases, a clear, matter-of-fact statement of the behavior expected should be effective for young children. One of the main goals of guidance and limit-setting strategies is to help children achieve internal impulse control. Any put-down method that must be used over and over again with the same children is not achieving that goal.

A major feature of using the approach "I like the way Robin is behaving" is that it is designed to modify behavior by comparing children and through the comparison to show up faulty behavior. In terms of building a classroom ethos, frequent use of this implicitly comparative approach may undermine children's capacities to take pleasure in each other's good fortune, gifts, successes. It is preferable to say matter-of-factly, without rancor or accusation, something like "Please turn around and listen quietly" to the child whose behavior warrants it.

Our emphasis on matter-of-factness stems from our view that teacher guidance of this kind, while it is essential, should not constitute a major focus of teacher-child interaction. Such actions by the teacher should not be affectively loaded so that they become a big issue in the class.

Many teachers see the comparative method (e.g., "I like the way Kim is sitting") primarily as a way of using praise to reinforce desirable behavior. In principle, however, it is best to use praise sparingly. It is doubtful whether children benefit from constant flattery and hearing repeatedly that they "did a great job." In fact, this approach may be counterproductive. Frequently, comments like, "I like the way you helped Annie" may suggest to the children that the teacher does not normally expect helpfulness.

In our observation, praise given too frequently is often intrusive and counterproductive to the development of children's capacity to become deeply absorbed in social and intellectual pursuits. In addition, it teaches children to focus on *how* they are doing rather than on *what* they are doing—a practice that in the long term is associated with weak persistence and lowered self-confidence in children (Dweck & Elliott, 1983). Furthermore, when praise is used too frequently, it is apt to lose its meaning. When it is not used enough, however, a few children may become dispirited and give up trying to meet teacher expectations.

Some teachers make approving statements (such as, "I like the way Robin is sitting") to each child in the group in turn to ensure that no one feels left out. With a group of 20 or more, this is a questionable use of time. A certain amount of order is liberating; too much may be stifling, and too little may impede realization of the teacher's educational goals. The purpose of rules and routines is to make it possible for the really important aspects of classroom life to go smoothly: the pursuit of intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, and moral learning goals.

While it is never necessary to be unkind, or to humiliate or insult a child, it is sometimes necessary to be firm or even stern in a one-to-one context. Children are unlikely to be harmed by firmness directed to them by adults who clearly respect them and their feelings and with whom they have already established a positive relationship.

Appropriate Use of Timeout. Informal observation indicates that a timeout or thinking chair is a common strategy that teachers use with children who violate classroom norms, particularly by being aggressive. Theories about why children exhibit inappropriate aggression fall into two general categories: the deficit theory and the excess theory. Deficit theory posits that children are aggressive because they lack something: some kind of social knowledge or skill, or sufficient impulse control. Some preschoolers, for example, may not know how to express their needs or wants and so resort to bullying to achieve their objectives. If they learn alternative skills with which to be assertive, their need for aggressive approaches can be substantially diminished.

According to the excess theory, children are aggressive because they cannot cope with their high levels of anger or aggression, and as a result their internal state pushes them to act out aggressively. It is thought that the habit of being aggressive will be reduced by getting children to control the excess anger or develop control over their aggressive impulses. These two theories are not necessarily exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive.

The thinking chair might be thought of as a generic solution that assumes that punishment is always the most effective response to unwarranted aggression. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the thinking chair is used excessively and ineffectively in ways that demean children.

We have found no research that describes what children think when they are sent to a chair or their room to think about their unacceptable behavior. One of the risks of timeout

procedures is that they may cultivate children's taste for revenge. If this happens, and the thinking or timeout chair is used repeatedly with the same few children, its effectiveness in developing a child's capacity for impulse control is questionable. Timeout procedures (e.g., a baby corner, timeout chair, bad chair) could be judged effective if they were rarely used for the same child more than two or three times. Furthermore, timeout procedures used as punishment humiliate children and violate the principle of respecting and validating children's feelings.

Another major disadvantage of using timeout as punishment is that it does not teach a child an alternative way of responding to the situation at hand. It is therefore unlikely to strengthen social skills. In fact, punitive timeout procedures often distract both the child and the teacher from the difficult processes of learning how to solve problems in social relationships. For the teacher, the problem is how to help a child change what is often a chronic tendency to behave in self-defeating, irritating ways that disrupt the rest of the class. From the child's point of view, because the disruptive child is frequently rejected by others, his or her behavior often leads to painful and difficult interaction with peers. The child and the teacher can both benefit from resolving the problem and ending a cycle of misbehavior and punishment, which is likely to reinforce the child's tendency to misbehave, rather than change it for the better.

An appropriate use of timeout procedures is to withdraw disruptive children from the flow of action they seem unable to manage so that they will calm down and regain control over their impulses. Such withdrawal, which is very much like a timeout in a basketball game, is not intended as punishment. For example, a teacher might say to a child, "Jane, I think a few minutes of rest until you are not quite so angry with Jill is a good idea. Then the two of you can figure out how you can both have a turn on the slide. Let me know when you're ready to work things

out. I'll be glad to help." This strategy should be free of any hint of punitiveness.

Motivating Children without Putting Others Down. Teachers and parents often try to motivate children by implying that undesirable behavior means that they belong elsewhere. For example, we observed a teacher chiding a first grader for inappropriate behavior by saying, "You're not in kindergarten now." In this case, a clear statement or description of the desired behavior would have been preferable. A comparative strategy of this kind is risky because it may undermine children's capacities to respond charitably to less mature children and may encourage them to take comfort from others' troubles. This strategy may also teach children to become disdainful of their own progress and previous efforts. We suggest instead that teachers strive to create a classroom and school climate in which children learn to regard younger children in a positive light. In such a climate, children learn to take delight in seeing how far they have progressed and to accept and respect where their younger peers still are.

The Disposition to Approach Social Conflicts Experimentally

Many children have the understandings and skills to cope with social situations, but the disposition to use the skills is not sufficiently robust. For example, some children require encouragement to approach social situations involving turn-taking and confrontations as problem-solving situations. In such situations a teacher can help in several ways. Knowing from observation that a child who is being rebuffed is fairly articulate, she might ask the child, "What have you tried so far?" She can discuss what the child wants to try next to solve the problem. If the child is inexperienced, very hesitant, or not very articulate, the teacher can help by saying

something like, "Go back and say, 'I want a turn!' If that doesn't help, let me know, and we can talk about something else to try."

If the teacher offers a strategy (e.g., "Tell Chris you want a turn") without adding the suggestion to return if it fails, and if indeed the strategy does fail, a child's sense of incompetence may be increased. In our view, adding the tag, "Let me know, and we can talk about something else to try," strengthens a child's disposition to approach social situations experimentally without feeling cut off when first efforts are flawed.

The Content of Relationships

Sometimes teachers' attempts to deal with children who resist the classroom rules and routines become focused primarily on the undesirable behavior, the rules, and who will get the upper hand in the struggle. Violation of a rule, especially when others' rights or safety are at stake, must be addressed firmly, clearly, matter-of-factly and expeditiously. However, long-term social development is most likely to be supported when the teacher fosters a relationship with the errant child that centers on content other than the behavior to be changed. In other words, a child is helped when the teacher addresses the undesirable behavior firmly, consistently, and straightforwardly, and *also* develops her relationship with that child around a topic or activity of interest to the child. When the relationship between a teacher and a child is primarily about the child's misbehavior, teacher and child become locked in a power struggle.

Hawkins (1986) points out that the child and his or her behavior constitute appropriate content for a relationship between a therapist and patient. The content of relationships between

teachers and pupils should be primarily about topics and activities unrelated to misbehavior, but related to intellectual goals of the program. Similarly, the teacher's interactions with the whole class should be mainly about what the children are learning, planning, and thinking, as well as their interest in each other, and only minimally about the rules and routines. One way to evaluate a class ethos is to assess the extent to which the content of teacher-child interaction concerns the routines and the rules of behavior rather than the ideas, activities, and other intellectual concerns.

Fostering a Sense of Justice with Ground Rules

Teachers can help create a prosocial environment in the classroom when they indicate that the expectations and rules invoked apply equally to all children and that they respond to individual children's needs as they arise. For example, when the teacher indicates that hurting a playmate is not allowed, she could say something like, "*I don't want you to hurt Jim, and I don't want anyone to hurt you, either.*" By adding the second part of the statement, the teacher communicates a sense of concern with justice. The message is that the rule she invoked when she stopped the aggressor's behavior will be applied just as faithfully to protect the child should he or she ever be a victim of the same behavior. Similarly, she might respond to a child who is experiencing particular stress by taking that child on her lap. Then, if others demand a place on it too, she can say something like, "Joey is having a really hard time today and needs my special help right now. *On a day when you are having a hard time, my lap will be here for you, too.*"

Some teachers fear that rejection of the second child's request for lap time will be perceived as unfair or unequal treatment. Research on parents' socialization of their children's

sense of justice (Ross, Tesla, Kenyo, & Lollis, 1990) found that parents "instill a sense of justice in their children to the extent that they respect their children's views, clearly explain the logic of their own positions, and emphasize equality" in addressing conflicts (p. 994). We suggest that it is important to distinguish between treating children alike and treating them equally. Because children's needs, feelings, dispositions, and behavior vary, it would be unfair to treat them all alike. Instead, a healthy social environment is one in which children's individual differences and needs are responded to with equal concern and respect. In the second part of the two teacher statements suggested above, the teacher conveys the idea that the children are in a just environment—one where all children's needs are taken with the same seriousness as they arise.

Appealing to Children's Good Sense

Giving children responsibility for developing some of the classroom procedures and rules signals to them that the teacher assumes that children's motives are genuine and sensible. For example, if children are working on a project, perhaps building a house together, and efforts are hampered by too many children working on the project at the same time, the teacher can suggest that they develop a schedule so that small groups can take turns working on it. If their schedule does not turn out very well, they can evaluate it, discuss the flaws, revise it, and try again. If the adults make most of the decisions and rules governing social participation, children are deprived of opportunities to use their judgment and exercise their good sense.

Studies of self-attribution processes suggest that when we address children believing that they are capable of approaching social conflicts and problems sensibly, they are apt to think of

themselves as sensible and responsible. Such self-attributions make it more likely that children will manifest their problem-solving, constructive, and other prosocial dispositions. Clearly, some children are more sensible than others. However, when teachers assume that children are usually motivated to engage in constructive and productive activities, teachers are likely to support and strengthen the children's dispositions to behave responsibly and sensibly.

Character Definition

Most adults tend to define children's characters very early. We define subgroups as "the quiet ones," "the noisy ones," "the easy ones," and "the difficult ones." Or we define individuals with such designations as "the class clown," "the whiner," "the defiant one," and so forth. To some extent, defining children's characters is a type of shorthand and serves as a way of avoiding information overload. However, there is reason to believe that children tend to bring their behavior into line with the way they are defined by those who are significant to them. Rabiner and Coie (1989) speculate that one reason unpopular children experience repeated rejection is not that they do not know how to behave in socially skilled ways, but that they expect to be disliked and that this expectation prevents them from using the skills they have in their repertoires.

Rabiner and Coie (1989) reasoned that if they could induce rejected children to believe they were well-liked by their playmates, their behavior would become more confident and skilled, and they would in turn be more accepted by their peers. This was in fact what happened. The rates of acceptance by others did not change for a control group whose self-attributions were not changed.

Even adults have difficulty breaking out of the character definitions their families long ago assigned to them. We have heard many examples of adults who feel quite capable and competent among their friends and colleagues. When they visit their families, however, they are treated the way they were defined as children (e.g., indecisive, clumsy, timid), and they behave the way the family members expect them to. If adults cannot resist the definitions of significant others, we can easily see that children would feel compelled to behave as they believe they are expected to. Children defined as class clowns might feel they let others down if they fail to amuse one and all as expected!

Teachers often hear from other teachers about a child who is particularly difficult. Teachers often develop characterizations that cause them to focus on children's weaknesses and overlook their strengths. This occurs even for children whose behavior is not particularly difficult. Because character definitions have the effect of self-fulfilling prophecies, a teacher can help break a negative cycle by resisting the tendency to reinforce the negative definition of the child. A strategy teachers have found helpful is to imagine what particular children would be like without the difficulty that is causing the definitional problem. Thinking carefully and deeply about these children, the teacher creates in her mind as full a picture as she can of how they would behave, what they would say, how they would move, interact, and talk if they were free from whatever difficulties they have. Once this picture of what the children could be like is fully developed, the teacher can then respond to the children as she has imagined them to be.

Our experience with this approach suggests that it is helpful because the new definition of a child's character helps the teacher notice positive behaviors she had been unaware of before. The negative definition of the child's character had caused the teacher to focus on problematic

behaviors and be constantly on the alert for their manifestation, so that she failed to notice the child's feeble and ineffective attempts to interact competently. The positive characterization helps the teacher to respond to the child more positively, which in turn increases the chances that the child will use his or her underdeveloped skills and thus shift into a productive recursive cycle.

The strategy recommended here for helping children with particularly difficult characteristics is another form of appealing to children's good sense as discussed above. In both strategies, the teachers' expectations can have a powerful effect on children's behavior. And in both, the point is not to manipulate children, but to realize how potent, though often subtle, the attitudes and statements of teachers can be in promoting or discouraging the acceptance of "difficult" children by others in the class.

Allowing Time to Observe

Some children require time and freedom to observe others in action before they attempt social interaction. A child may seem to be spending inordinate amounts of time painting at the easel, when he or she is in fact keeping one eye on the other children and checking out what happens to those who play with this one and that one, what areas of play might be the least stressful for a beginner, whom not to antagonize, or who might be a pushover if a conflict arises.

Some children take longer than others to develop trust in adults outside the family. Children's sense of trust and affection for the teacher can form the basis of their desire to meet the teacher's expectations. If all other aspects of children's functioning raise no alarms, giving them time to observe and ease into group participation is likely to be an effective approach.

Helping Children Cope with Adversity

Teachers help to educate children's feelings and emotions in the way they respond to their manifestation (Power, 1985; Leavitt & Power, 1989). Thus one of the responsibilities of teachers is to help children distinguish between what is a tragedy and what is not. A classroom climate can become very contentious if many of its members treat every other reversal as a personal tragedy. Young children should not be encouraged to believe that it is a disaster if they miss a turn with a toy. Children do not always have to get what they want. When one child knocks down another's blocks, it is unfortunate and annoying, but not a disaster; most structures can be rebuilt. If incidents of this kind occur frequently, then other principles of teaching and curriculum have to be considered.

Similarly, children do not have to be liked or accepted by all the children in their group all the time. If individual children complain that another child does not like them, the teacher can acknowledge that the event is regrettable and remind them that they have other friends; or she can let them know that *she* is glad they are in the group.

On the other hand, when someone is suffering, is in real pain, is hurt, or is about to move away and be separated from loved ones, it is appropriate to experience deep sorrow, and teachers can reassure children that the sadness, though hard to bear, will subside.

If children make an inordinate fuss about not getting a turn with a toy or about accidental damage inflicted on their work, the teacher can say something like, "I know you're disappointed, but there are other things available for you to play with," or "I agree it's annoying when your work is spoiled, but you can make it again." These are the sort of statements teachers can use

to validate a child's feelings without agreeing that they are appropriate. The use of such statements minimizes the chances of the classroom climate being marked by excessive emotional outbursts.

The Teacher as Model

Because modeling is such a powerful way of learning, it is a good idea for the teacher to be particularly alert to her interactions with the children (O'Conner, 1969, 1972). For example, when she is helping to resolve conflicts or is making suggestions to children about their interactions with others, the teacher can make sure she is interacting rather than lecturing. Sometimes the interaction will involve finding out what happened and what each child's goals were when the conflict or problem occurred. Soliciting the children's reaction to the teacher's suggestions (e.g., "Would it help if you put up your buildings on opposite sides of the mat?") is also appropriate at times. As long as the question put to the children is genuine and not an oblique command, the children can see this strategy as a model of how to approach conflicts. Not every suggestion needs to be handled in this way. But soliciting the children's ideas and remaining open to the cues in their behavior helps the teacher to make informed suggestions. Soliciting information and ideas from children models an interactive style of relating to others and seeking solutions to problems.

III. Specific Teaching Strategies

Fostering Social Understanding

A number of the components of friendship-making skills have been identified. Extensive research comparing well-liked children with those who are not well-liked indicates that social knowledge plays a significant role in initiating and maintaining successful relations with peers (Gottman, 1983). Some children need help to understand that some peers have experiences, backgrounds, desires, family routines, and points of view that differ from their own. The following discussion covers strategies that teachers can use to bring about this understanding.

Arousing Children's Empathy and Altruism. In some contexts it is appropriate to stimulate children's empathic and altruistic dispositions. Suppose, for example, that a child has been waiting a long time for a turn with a piece of equipment. When the teacher feels that the child who is using the equipment should yield it to the child who is waiting, she can calmly say, "Robin has been waiting a long time, and you know how it feels to wait." The second part of the statement is made in a straightforward manner that conveys no accusation of meanness or shame or any other negative characteristic. Along the same lines, a strategy that may be particularly important in the case of aggressive children is to help them develop some understanding of the effect of their actions on other children and of others' feelings in difficult situations.

Alerting Children to Others' Feelings and Interests. In appropriate contexts it is helpful for adults to alert children to others' feelings and interests. For example, in the course of a discussion about plans for an activity, a teacher might ask one child or several children what they think an absent child might prefer, or how that child might react to the plans that have been developed thus far. This strategy differs from the one discussed earlier where the teacher asked, "How do you think the others would feel if I let you sit on my lap?" This question is an indirect attempt on the teacher's part to decline the child's request and is rarely intended to develop understanding and insight. The strategy recommended here is intended to stimulate and strengthen children's dispositions to anticipate others' feelings and to be aware of others' interests. When teachers raise these issues, they convey the idea that general sensitivity to others' opinions, interests, and feelings is valued.

We observed a good example of the appropriate use of this strategy in a class of four-year-olds. The teacher talked with them about four absent children who were expected to move to another school after the holidays. She began the discussion by telling them which children would not be returning and saying, "I think it would be nice if our class gave them something to help them remember their time with us. Any ideas about what we could do?" About half of the group offered suggestions; most of the others reacted to the suggestions offered. The discussion ended with general agreement that the children should prepare a picture for each of the departing children to hang up in his or her new home. Further discussion led the group to divide themselves into four groups; each group volunteered to produce a picture for one of the departing classmates. The teacher then led the whole group in a discussion of what the group's members thought each of the departing students would find most interesting and enjoyable about

their experience in the class. During the discussion, children shared their recollections of each of their absent classmates' interests, favorite field trips, and so forth. The pictures that the four groups enthusiastically produced were delightfully detailed and personalized.

This strategy need not be used only in the context of conflict. It is appropriate for any context in which a variety of feelings and opinions are present—not just for contexts involving injury or crisis. The goal of the strategy is to develop children's dispositions to speculate and to predict and anticipate the responses and feelings of peers to various events and experiences.

Encouraging Alternative Interpretations of Behavior. Sometimes children assign negative labels to peers who are different or difficult or whom they dislike. They may try to nickname a classmate as "weirdo" or "nerd" or apply to the classmate the current, favorite insult. A teacher can cultivate a constructive social environment by encouraging the accusers to consider other ways of interpreting the labeled child's behavior. The teacher might mention that the labeled child is new to the class or that the child's family does things differently. Whether the teacher happens upon the correct interpretation of the labeled child's unique characteristics does not really matter. The important point is to communicate to the labeling children that she expects them to think about reasons for the differences among the children in the class, that *she* accepts the differences, and that she expects the children to respect the differences.

From time to time, teachers are confronted with children who tend to disrupt large or small group discussions or work by making comments unrelated to the situation, and whose comments are described as "off-the-wall." Unfortunately, such children are readily labeled by their peers as "weirdos." In some such cases, the behavior is the result of insensitivity to their peers' interests and inability to read social situations accurately. In other cases, the child changes

the subject because he or she cannot contribute to it and feels left out. Others may behave this way because they are way ahead of their peers on the subject and lack patience with those behind them. In each of these cases, the children need the teacher's assistance if they are to learn to participate in group discussions in an appropriate manner by gaining insight into social situations.

In the first two cases, a teacher can help by offering suggestions about topics that might interest children or by indicating topics likely to interest particular children. In the third case, the teacher can encourage the child to be more patient and at the same time can validate the child's feelings by indicating that it is sometimes hard to wait when a discussion is going slowly. The teacher's remarks should not be heavy-handed, nor should they imply that the children are in any way selfish or mean.

Helping Children Discover Common Ground. The development of friendships can often be eased when would-be friends discover interests, experiences, or preferences they hold in common (Gottman, 1983). A teacher can prime the pump by indicating what interests or experiences one child holds in common with another child. These shared interests may form the basis of a solid friendship. So, for example, a teacher might say to a child, "Jenny also collects shells," or "Jimmy is interested in dinosaurs too." When a child is eager to share news about a trip to the children's museum, the teacher might say, "Don't forget to tell Jean about what you saw. She went there last week."

This strategy is consistent with the more general strategy of referring children to one another so that they develop the disposition to share thoughts and feelings and to recount experiences to each other. This practice can foster a pattern of frequent child-child interaction so that communication does not always have to be directed to adults or pass through them.

Strengthening Interactive Skills

Approach Strategies. Some children find it easier to enter ongoing play groups when they are able to use opening gambits. Depending on the child, the suggestion can be quite indirect or very specific. As suggested in the discussion above, if individual children are making good progress in verbal interactive skills, the teacher can discuss with them what they have tried and what they think they should try next. But in the case of a child just getting started on interactive play and with few verbal skills, the teacher can be more direct. Suggestions could include statements such as, "Go to Jane and say, 'Can I work on this side of the building?'" The teacher should model the appropriate tone for the request. A teacher who wishes to take a more indirect approach could suggest that the child ask other children what they are planning, doing, or making. Children can also ask how they might be able to help. It should be noted that approaches to groups are likely to be successful if the approacher makes positive comments about what the group is doing.

Verbal Approaches. Verbal skills play a critical role in social interaction, even in the early years. Teachers can help children develop verbal skills by indicating to the children ways in which they can state their feelings, desires, and ideas clearly. The teacher's knowledge of each child provides a basis on which the teacher can offer suggested phrases at the appropriate level of complexity. For one child, the suggestion might be, "Say to Ann, 'Please pass me that crayon,' or 'I want to use the paint brush a bit longer.'" For another child, the suggestion might be, "Let Jimmy know that it bothers you when he makes the table shake." In some cases, it is useful to suggest topics for conversation. The specificity of the suggestions offered should depend on the teacher's assessment of the child's competencies.

Turn-Taking Skills. Parents and teachers often urge young children to share their possessions. But more often than not, the appropriate behavior is turn-taking. A large part of social interaction requires turn-taking. Conversations, discussions, carrying one's weight in the household duties, and using the amenities all involve some form of coordinated turn-taking. Turn-taking involves being able to detect cues in the partner's behavior indicating that the other is about to bring his or her turn to an end, discerning what moment would be the most propitious to press for one's turn, and so forth. Mastery of these skills takes time and lots of experience.

One of the common complaints that young children bring to their teachers is that another child will not allow them to have a turn with an object or piece of equipment in short supply. As suggested above, most of these cases can be resolved by encouraging children to return to the situation and ask for a turn. The teacher should indicate that if that does not help, the children should come back and consider another strategy with the teacher. Children who resist the request to give a turn beyond a reasonable amount of time can be reminded that others are waiting.

Two further considerations discussed above should be kept in mind here. One is that the type of incident in question sometimes provides appropriate contexts for arousing children's capacity for empathy and altruism. This can be done by telling the individual children something like, "You know how it feels to wait for a turn for a long time." The basic principle here is to appeal to a resisting child's capacity for generosity and good sense. If this strategy fails, the teacher must intercede after a suitable waiting period by offering, without rancor, a simple explanation such as, "I think Robin has waited long enough." The explanation can be followed with a friendly chat about other activities the child might find of interest. This will prevent such incidents from becoming the major content of a resisting child's relationship with the teacher.

Negotiating Skills. Many aspects of social interaction involve negotiation among participants as to the sequence, structure, and general give-and-take of the interaction. Successful negotiation involves being able to guess fairly accurately what will appeal to another child and being able to make a deal in which each participant's preferences or needs are considered (Rubin & Everett, 1982). Kurdek and Krile (1982) found that sociometric status—which indicates how well individuals are liked by their peers—is related to skill in developing compromises.

Many children benefit from help in developing skills for negotiating and compromising. For children making progress in social participation, the teacher can discuss with them their ideas about possible compromises. However, in the case of inexperienced or hesitant children, the teacher can offer phrases for the children to use and can suggest some bargains that could be struck. For example, the teacher could suggest to one child that he or she say to another child "I'll pull you in the wagon if you push me on the swing after."

Suggesting Reasons for Assertions. Studies indicate that well-liked children are more able than their less well-liked peers to reduce tension in play by offering reasons for their insistence on their points of view (Gottman, 1983). Sometimes a teacher can help by suggesting reasons children might give for their stance in a conflict. In research comparing popular children with unpopular children, the former used a softened form of rejection when resisting the efforts of another child to play or direct the activity. Hazen, Black, and Fleming-Johnson (1982) found that popular children tactfully rejected their peers' requests and demands. Such a rejection might be expressed with words like, "I can't play right now 'cause I already started this game, but maybe later, OK?" A squabble about who is to play the role of waitress might be diffused when one of the children insists that she has to be the waitress "Because my mommy is one!"

Help for Bullies. Even in the preschool period, some children are capable of making their peers do things against their will or preventing them from exercising their will. Boys who manifest this pattern are usually labeled "bullies," while girls are described as "bossy." A teacher has to be concerned about both the bully and the bossy child and those whose failure to resist may cause them to become easy targets for such aggression.

While bullies appear to be strong and to get what they want from their social situation, they may nevertheless feel unlikable and suffer from low self-esteem. Children who are persistently aggressive are usually a problem to themselves and to others. This behavior pattern is highly correlated with low sociometric standing among peers, is the most stable over time, and is the most predictive of later life difficulties (Parker & Asher, 1987). Coie and Dodge (1983) found the most highly stable behavioral traits among children who were described by their peers as "disruptive" and "starts fights." Children rejected for these behaviors seldom outgrow them on their own.

Children who are chronically aggressive or who bully other children should be distinguished from those who are appropriately assertive in defending their rights or who engage in a certain amount of rough and tumble play. In addition, a transitory period of more pronounced aggressiveness may be a step towards maturity on the part of a child who has passively yielded to others' assertions or has habitually withdrawn to adult protection (Maccoby, 1980). Because aggression carries a high cost, it is usually discarded in favor of mature techniques.

But aggression sometimes carries short-term benefits and is not always discarded. In one study, Maccoby (1980) noted that three quarters of aggressive acts by one preschool child against

another met with positive consequences for the aggressor; that is, the aggressor got what he or she wanted. Furthermore, when bullies succeeded in getting what they wanted, the chances of their using the same method in the future increased. Children who continue to use aggression as a tool and fail to adopt more mature techniques within a short period need help in breaking a potentially dangerous cycle. Some children may be motivated to change their behavior if they are helped to understand the connection between their low social status and their aggressiveness. Others require direct teacher intervention in curbing their aggressive impulses and in understanding how their behavior affects others.

Most children probably benefit at one time or another from help in handling a bully. Some children, however, have particular difficulty in standing up to bullies. Dodge and Coie (1989) suggest that there is increasing awareness of the role of the victim in a bully-victim relationship. Preliminary research suggests that the bully is not randomly aggressive toward other children, but frequently has favorite victims.

Teachers often attempt to modify bullying behavior by asking the bully questions like, "How would you like someone to do X to you?" Questions of that nature ask young children to be more analytical and reflective than they are likely to be able to be. Such questions usually yield a statement like, "I don't care," or some other noncommittal response. We recommend a twofold approach. The first part of the strategy is teach children who are being victimized by bullies how to respond to their demands gracefully. If victims respond pugnaciously, they will surely fail, because bullies are usually good at getting their way. Counteraggression sanctions bullies' use of their preferred and well-practiced style of interaction. Teachers can suggest to potential victims that they can resist calmly.

Second, when appropriate to the competence of individuals in the incident, the teacher can suggest that they let bullies or bossy children know how they feel about them. For potential victims who are less articulate, the teacher can offer a phrase to use, and she can model the graceful but assertive tone in which to use it. Thus the teacher could say to a child protesting being pushed by a bully, "Say to Robin, 'I don't like to be pushed!'" The tone should not hint at the temptation adults often have to just give the bully what he deserves! The teacher should also explain to the bully how the victim feels. These explanations should not imply that the teacher rejects the bully or bossy child. If this twofold strategy fails to diminish the bossy or bullying behavior, the teacher must step in more firmly to reduce it as it unfolds.

Pairing Children. In some cases, it is useful to pair a less well-liked child with a more popular (but not the most popular) child when the children are to undertake a particular task. Such pairings should be made firmly, not sentimentally, and without any hint to the more popular child that he or she is being a martyr and deserves a medal. If the more popular child protests the assignment, it is a good idea to accept the protest matter-of-factly, but insist firmly and without fuss that the assignment be carried out expeditiously. The teacher's insistence conveys to the children involved, and possibly to those observing from the sidelines, that she expects children to work together even if they are not best friends and that children do not necessarily have to like each other to work together.

Tattling. From time to time, a teacher is confronted with a child who seeks attention through tattling or telling tales about other children. Instead of accepting and acting on the information offered, the teacher can send the child back to the situation and ask him or her to remind the others about the rules. Again, this suggestion is best made in a matter-of-fact tone.

In an unpublished pilot study with kindergarten children, McClellan (1989) found that tattling correlated moderately with aggression. Anecdotal evidence indicated that children who tattled about one another tended to respond aggressively to conflict and to tell tales about others at higher than average rates. Both tendencies might be related to ineffective strategies for dealing with conflict. But in some cases, telling tales is related to high needs for adult attention or approval.

By the time children are seven or eight years old, teachers can help them understand when they should inform the teacher that another's behavior is endangering persons or property. During the preschool and kindergarten years, children are not yet able to recognize such instances, and adults must accept responsibility for monitoring where the children are and the potential risks of the situations they are in.

Summary

Various strategies have been outlined. Some of them address the range of general social difficulties that teachers of young children inevitably encounter, and others address specific difficulties. As far as we know, nothing works for all children, and all of the strategies we have recommended can be overdone! Many children with social difficulties require more specialized help than the teacher can provide. However, we know from our own experience and the experiences of many of our students who teach young children that spending a little time alone with a child—perhaps ten minutes a day for a week or two—can often help the child make a big step in a positive direction. The time spent alone with the teacher, doing something simple and pleasurable, often reassures individual children that the teacher really cares about them. Time alone is not only valuable for the child; it can also help a teacher to focus on the child's positive attributes.

IV. Provision of Worthwhile Activities

Some activities are more conducive to peer interaction than others. The way teachers plan and arrange the environment and play activities influences children's opportunities to acquire and practice social skills. Many of the behavior problems dealt with by sending a child to the thinking chair, for example, may be—at least in part—due to an inadequate classroom organization or a curriculum that is unresponsive to the developmental level and needs of the particular child. Structural concerns that might influence the social life of the classroom group include the class size, the kind of space used, the variety and types of equipment available, the schedule of activities, teacher-child ratios, the age range of the children, and the content of the curriculum (see Katz, Evangelou. & Hartman, 1990). Informal activities such as spontaneous dramatic play and group project work (Katz & Chard, 1989), in which children explore and investigate a topic of real interest to them, build and make things together, and report their work to each other, can provide important contexts for peer interaction and genuine cooperation. The following discussion examines some of the aspects of classroom provision that facilitate positive social development in the classroom.

Balancing Individual and Group Activities

For the most part, children acquire and strengthen their social understanding and skills in the context of engaging in worthwhile activities with each other. The principle implied by this is that

an early childhood curriculum should strive to achieve a balance between activities designed for individual effort and those requiring or inviting group cooperative efforts. It appears that most early childhood programs overemphasize individual effort and products at the expense of activities in which cooperation is essential. Activities and tasks in which interaction makes a real difference to what is planned, experienced, and accomplished should be given as much attention as those designed for solitary activity. In the early years, the time allocated to various kinds of activities should be balanced so that opportunities for cooperative and spontaneous interaction and dramatic play are available on a daily basis.

Curriculum Approaches

Sometimes changes in the structure and content of the program have a greater impact on group and individual social behavior than does direct intervention in an individual's behavior. Although there is some evidence on the relationship between curriculum approaches and social outcomes, it is not abundant. Bruner (1986) found that children who participated in some sort of high-level intellectual activity at some time during the day increased the richness and complexity of their spontaneous play.

A recent study indicates that classroom structures and procedures can have enduring personal and societal consequences. In a longitudinal study of the Perry Preschool Project, conducted by Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner (1986), the long-term effects of three preschool programs on children from low-income families were examined. Although different in other respects, two of the preschool programs emphasized helping children develop positive social

skills and provided a relatively informal context in which opportunities for social interaction were plentiful. In the third program, which was formal, teacher-directed, rapid-fire, and drill-based, the child's acquisition of social skills was not an articulated goal or value.

When youths who had attended one of the three programs were compared at age 15, little difference in I.Q. or academic achievement was found. These youths significantly exceeded members of the control group in I.Q. and achievement in school. However, unlike the first two approaches, the direct instruction curriculum model appeared to be less effective in mitigating damaging effects of the low-income environment on children's social adjustment. In terms of frequency of delinquent acts, children who had been in classes using direct instruction were more like children with no preschool experience. They engaged in twice as many delinquent acts as did members of the other two groups. These acts included five times as many acts of property violence. Children from the direct instruction group engaged in the same levels of drug abuse and reported the same poor family relations, low participation in sports, and low expectations for educational attainment as did children with no preschool experience.

Another difference between the program types involves children's opportunity for control in their choice of activity. Both the Perry Preschool and the traditional preschool consistently offered children opportunities to be self-directed in their choice of activity, while the activities were mostly teacher-directed in the direct instruction approach.

Haskins (1985) found that preschoolers who had been in a formal academic program showed increased levels of aggression in elementary school. Children in the control group, who attended a traditional preschool program, showed significantly less aggression. These findings are consistent with other research (see Johnson, Johnson, Holubee, & Roy, 1984) that suggests a

positive relationship between indicators of psychological health and educational models that encourage social interaction and development in students. The findings are significant because they underscore the importance of providing adequate opportunity for children to socialize and learn from one another in informal contexts.

Children who learn that they have the capacity and opportunity to exert control over their actions early in life may come to take responsibility for their own actions. Katz and Chard (1989) have suggested that an optimum rather than a minimum or maximum amount of informality in the classroom be sought. A program has maximum informality when it has few routines, little adult input and guidance, and when it rarely includes group projects. Minimum informality occurs when a program imposes on the children many rules and routines and a great deal of adult direction and little opportunity for children to make decisions or choices. Thus one of the most important elements in encouraging healthy social development in children is the teacher's provision of an environment conducive to socialization by providing ample time for children to socialize with one another and to make choices and decisions about their play and work with guidance to facilitate productive, satisfying, and interesting experiences.

Piaget (Kamii, 1973) emphasized the importance of peers in children's social and cognitive development. It is with peers that the child must confront the beliefs of those who see things differently. By hearing different ideas and having their ideas challenged, children begin to reexamine them. Social interaction with peers is, in Piaget's view, a natural source of paradox or disequilibrium, which stimulates social and cognitive growth. If this is the case, then one could predict that children who do not experience a "normal amount of peer interaction consistently over a number of years may evidence deficits in social cognitive development" (Rubin, 1983).

Types of Materials and Activities

Some kinds of equipment, toys, and materials elicit considerably more complex social interaction among children than do others. Sociodramatic play, house play, doll play, and play with blocks and trucks are more likely to elicit peer interaction than play with puzzles, easels, paper, and clay.

Connolly and Doyle (1983) found that children who engaged in frequent and complex fantasy play with peers were more popular and demonstrated greater social skill than did others. But it is difficult to know which comes first—play experience or social skills. Researchers have also found that fantasy or pretend play is more positive, sustained, and group-oriented than is nonfantasy play. Pretend play may be the activity where preschool children have the greatest opportunity to practice social skills in a content area that is highly engaging. Successful social pretend play requires the use of considerable skill because the child must integrate two or more viewpoints—his or her own and those of other children—in a way that is acceptable and meaningful to all and is consistent with the story line being enacted.

It may be that for children of this age, fantasy play provides a significant framework for the practice and refinement of social skill. Children who have skill in this area may thus have greater opportunity than others to practice the cognitive and affective dimensions involved in social competence. Put in another way, pretend or fantasy play can be viewed not only as a context of interest to preschoolers, but also as a skill in its own right, the development of which may give preschool children a greater sense of play competence and may make them more attractive play partners.

Because play is such a dominant feature of the preschool years and because social interaction is such a dominant feature of play, it is reasonable to assume that the preschool years constitute a period in which children are particularly sensitive to the development of social competence. If this is so, lack of opportunity for children to interact socially in play during the early years may have a more deleterious effect than does lack of opportunity for play at a later stage.

Conclusion

Human beings spend most of their lives in the company of others. The foundations of the capacity to function effectively in social contexts are laid during the early years. The evidence suggests that the best time to help children with this major developmental challenge is during the first half-dozen years of life. Once young children begin to spend large proportions of their time in group settings, adults have a unique opportunity to contribute to the processes of building a solid foundation for the children's social learning.

We suggest that social development be included in the assessments of individual children's growth and learning throughout the early years. We also suggest that evaluations of the effectiveness and appropriateness of early childhood programs include observing the extent to which opportunities for social interaction are available and appropriate teaching strategies are used. Evaluations should also address the impact of the curriculum model and materials used on children's social development.

One of the main themes throughout this discussion is the importance of teachers speaking to children—even young ones—as people with minds. We urge the use of warm, direct, matter-of-fact, and straightforward speech with children. It is unnecessary to be sentimental at one extreme, or grim and somber at the other. We realize that everything we have suggested can be overdone and that some suggestions contradict others in certain ways. But there are no simple,

easily applied formulas that solve the complexities involved in teaching young children. Nevertheless, we are persuaded by the evidence, our experiences, and the experiences of many colleagues that the early years are a propitious time to help children establish a firm foundation in social relationships.

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